

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 09571 291002Z

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ACTION NEA-10

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R 290900Z JUL 75

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5512

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

USINT BAGHDAD UNN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

DIA WASHDC

USCINCEUR

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, LE

SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER KARAME OUTLINES POLICY HOPES

1. PRIME MINISTER RASHID KARAME GAVE A SPEECH JULY 27 AT A GATHERING COMMEMORATING THE 23RD ANNIVERSARY OF THE EGYPTIAN REVOLUTION. THE TALK TURNED OUT TO BE A MAJOR POLICY REVIEW, OUTLINING KARAME'S HOPES FOR SOLVING SOME OF THE PROMINENT PROBLEMS PLAGUING LEBANON AT PRESENT. IT RECEIVED WIDE PRESS COVERAGE IN THE JULY 28 PAPERS. SIGNIFICANT ITEMS FROM THE SPEECH, AS REPORTED IN THE PRESS, ARE AS FOLLOWS:

-- THE PRESIDENCY: THE MOST WIDELY QUOTED REMARK OF THE SPEECH WAS KARAME'S DECLARATION THAT HE CONSIDERED HIMSELF "A CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC," BY WHICH HE INTENDED TO CONVEY NOT ONLY HIS POLITICAL AMBITIONS BUT ALSO HIS
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PAGE 02 BEIRUT 09571 291002Z

GENERAL BELIEF THAT CONFESSIONALISM MUST BE DISCARDED IN

CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS. HE ADDED THAT THE NECESSARY CHANGES MUST BE MADE DEMOCRATICALLY AND THROUGH A "FRE DIALOGUE." HE SAID HE THOUGHT THERE WAS "NOT A SINGLE CHRISTIAN" OPPOSED TO THIS APPROACH.

-- CONFessional BALANCE IN THE ARMY: AGREEING WITH THE CHARGE THAT THE ARMY HAD TAKEN ON A "CONFessional CHARACTER," KARAME SAID THAT CHANGES WERE BEING MADE TO CORRECT THIS IMBALANCE. (COMMENT: THERE ARE UNCONFIRMED REPORTS THAT RESHUFFLINGS ARE IN PROGRESS, NOT YET ANNOUNCED OFFICIALLY, THAT WILL REDUCE THE PROPORTION OF MARONITE OFFICERS AND INCREASE THAT OF SUNNIS, SHI'AS, AND DRUZE IN PROMINENT STAFF POSITIONS.) OTHER MEASURES WILL ALSO BE TAKEN, KARAME SAID, INCLUDING THE PRESENTATION OF A DRAFT LAW ON THE ARMY'S RESPONSIBILITIES.

-- NATURALIZATION MEASURES: A SIMMERING ISSUE OF LONG STANDING AMONG SEVERAL THOUSAND SUNNI INHABITANTS OF NORTH LEBANON WHO HAVE NOT BEEN GIVEN LEBANESE NATIONALITY, THIS QUESTION IS SYMBOLIC OF THE BROADER CONFessional DISPUTE. KARAME PROMISED THAT STEPS WOULD BE TAKEN AT ONCE TO RESOLVE THIS MATTER, AND HE EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE THAT SOME 90 PERCENT OF THE PENDING NATURALIZATION DEMANDS WOULD BE SETTLED IN FAVOR OF THE CLAIMANTS.

-- "SOCIAL PEACE:" IN ORDER TO RESTORE CONFIDENCE IN THE GOVT AMONG ECONOMICALLY DEPRIVED GROUPS, KARAME PROMISED AN AMBITIONS PROGRAM OF POPULAR HOUSING. ALSO, A NEW PLAN WILL BE PUT INTO EFFECT FOR THE POOR AREAS RINGING CENTRAL BEIRUT.

-- THE "PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE:" KARAME EXPRESSED GENERAL SUPPORT FOR THE PALESTINIANS, HOPING FOR COOPERATION BETWEEN THEM AND LEBANON SO THAT THE EFFORTS OF BOTH WOULD BE DIRECTED "AGAINST OUR TRUE COMMON ENEMY."

2. COMMENTS: AT THIS STAGE, KARAME'S WIDE-RANGING PLAN MUST BE CONSIDERED MORE AN INTENTION THAT A CONCRETE PROGRAM, BECAUSE IT IS DEBATABLE WHETHER HE CAN STEER IT PAST THE DANGEROUS POLITICAL SHOALS THAT LIE AHEAD. BUT HIS INTENTION IS UNQUESTIONABLY SERIOUS, AND IT IS ENCOURAGING THAT SOME OF LEBANON'S SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ILLS ARE BEING ADDRESSED IF NOT SOLVED. KARAME'S REMARK ABOUT HIS PRESIDENTIAL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 BEIRUT 09571 291002Z

CANDIDACY IS PROBABLY RHETORIC, DESIGNED TO DRAMATIZE HIS VIEW OF THE CONFessional PROBLEM, AND IT SHOULD NOT BE TAKEN AS ANNOUNCING HIS CANDIDACY FOR THE 1976 ELECTION.
GODLEY

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